United Nations S/PV.6734

Security Council

Sixty-seventh year

Provisional

6734th meeting

Monday, 12 March 2012, 9.50 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Hague	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Juppé
	Germany	Mr. Westerwelle
	Guatemala	Mr. Caballeros
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Haroon
	Portugal	Mr. Portas
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	South Africa	Mr. Sangqu
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United States of America	Mrs. Rodham Clinton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

12-25973 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 9.50 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, Ministers and other representatives participating in this meeting. Their collective presence is an affirmation of the importance of the subject matter to be addressed.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: It is a great pleasure to welcome the Ministers attending this important meeting. I thank Foreign Secretary Hague for using the United Kingdom's presidency of the Security Council to focus on the dramatic developments that have taken place in the Middle East and that are still in motion as we speak.

The remarkable events of the past year have transformed the region and changed the world. We see a newly democratizing Tunisia — the country that produced the initial spark that has since spread far and wide. We see Libya putting decades of dictatorship behind it. We see Yemen with a newly elected President. And we see people across the region — women and young people in the vanguard — continuing to call for freedom and human rights, for dignity and opportunity, for accountable Government, and for an end to corruption and monopolies of wealth and power. The spontaneous and home-grown democratic movements are a credit to the Arab people.

But we must also recognize that the cost in human suffering and loss of life has been large. We have reached a sober moment. In Egypt, we continue to urge a peaceful and early transfer of power to a civilian Government. In Bahrain, there remains a need for an all-inclusive dialogue and meaningful reform process. In still other countries, people are standing up and battling their fears to call for more political empowerment and social justice.

In Syria, what started as a peaceful, popular call for long-denied democratic rights has turned into a dangerous spiral of violence leading both Syria and the region into uncertainty. The Syrian Government has failed to fulfil its responsibility to protect its own people, and instead has subjected citizens in several cities to military assault and disproportionate use of force. These shameful operations continue. Sustained attacks against Idlib, Homs and elsewhere in the country have killed scores of people over the past couple of days, including women and children.

I thank the Security Council for supporting United Nations humanitarian efforts. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Valerie Amos, continues her efforts, following her visit to the country, to gain the unhindered access needed to respond to the devastation. The International Commission of Inquiry for Syria concluded that Syrian Government forces have committed widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations amounting to crimes against humanity.

And still the conflict deepens. Increasing numbers have fled internally or sought refuge in neighbouring countries. More groups are picking up arms. It is urgent for the international community to stop the violence. The General Assembly has spoken clearly in supporting the calls of the League of Arab States for a cessation of violence and a peaceful political solution. Together with Arab League Secretary-General Elaraby, I have asked former Secretary-General Kofi Annan to be our Joint Special Envoy and to use his good offices to facilitate urgent achievement of these goals. He will be assisted by Deputy Special Envoy Nasser Al-Kidwa.

As members will have followed closely, the Joint Special Envoy has just visited Syria over the weekend. Prior to that, he had intensive consultations with me and others in New York, as well as in Cairo with Secretary-General Elaraby and a wide range of ministers attending the Arab League ministerial meeting there. In Damascus, he met twice with President Al-Assad, with part of the opposition and with Syrian civil society, business and religious leaders. All interlocutors in Syria welcomed Mr. Annan's mission.

Mr. Annan held frank and comprehensive discussions with President Al-Assad, and put concrete proposals to the President. He urged President Al-Assad to take immediate steps to bring an end to violence and abuses, address the humanitarian crisis,

and embark with Mr. Annan's facilitation on a peaceful, inclusive, Syrian-led political process that would meet the legitimate and democratic aspirations of the Syrian people.

I add my voice to that of Mr. Annan in urging President Al-Assad to act swiftly, within the next few days, in response to the proposals put forward by the Joint Special Envoy. I appeal to the Security Council to unite strongly behind ending the violence and supporting Mr. Annan's mission to help Syria pull back from the brink of a deeper catastrophe. This is vital for the Syrian people and for the entire region.

I appreciate the recent initiatives of the Russian Federation and China, including their engagement with Syria and with the League of Arab States. At this crucial juncture, it will be essential for the Council to speak with one voice, and I hope that the Council can find its way towards adopting consensus resolution that sends a signal of strong resolve.

Let me also say a few words about the broader picture in the region going forward. I see five crucial points to bear in mind.

First, leaders must choose the path of meaningful reform, or make way for those who will. People do not want cosmetic changes that give only the merest taste of democracy. They want accountable governance and firm measures against corruption and cronyism.

Secondly, we must promote pluralism and protect the rights of minorities. Inclusive Government should be the watchword in the region's new democracies.

Thirdly, women have stood in the squares and streets demanding change, and now have a right to sit at the table, with real influence in decision-making and safe from violence, intimidation and abuse. The deficit in women's empowerment has held back the Arab region for too long.

Fourthly, we must create opportunities for young people. To absorb young entrants into the workforce, Arab countries need to create 50 million jobs within the next decade.

Fifthly, there must be regional peace. A regional awakening based on the ideals of freedom, dignity and non-violence cannot be complete without a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Yet, the past year has not brought about new momentum. The peace process continues to stagnate. The situation in Gaza is yet again proving its unsustainability. I am gravely concerned about the latest escalation between Gaza and Israel. Once again, civilians are paying a terrible price. Rocket attacks from Gaza against Israeli civilian areas are unacceptable and must stop immediately. I reiterate my call on Israel to exercise maximum restraint.

I have appealed to Israeli and Palestinian leaders to embrace regional changes and to show the courage and vision needed to reach a historic agreement. Together with my Quartet partners, with whom I met this morning, we will remain engaged to assist the parties in forging a way ahead. We must create the conditions for meaningful negotiations that will resolve the core permanent status issues — namely, with regard to territory, security, refugees and Jerusalem — and end the occupation that started in 1967. That is the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace that will realize the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security.

The region would also benefit from an end to tensions rooted in concerns over Iran's nuclear programme. I urge all sides to exercise the utmost care and restraint, commit to diplomatic efforts in good faith and comply with all relevant resolutions of the Council.

Two decades ago, a previous generation rebelled against tyranny in Eastern Europe. The international community was quick to help. Today, the international community should engage once again. As we do so, it will be crucial to move beyond some of the assumptions that have often governed relationships between Arab countries and their partners. One damaging notion is that the Arab world is not ready for democracy; another is that security must take precedence over human rights.

Those assumptions have had the effect of keeping unrepresentative Governments in power, with little to show for democracy or security. The United Nations, too, must update its approach to the region. We are placing the full spectrum of our expertise and best practices at the disposal of the countries in transition. We are strongly committed to doing our part to enable a profoundly changing region to achieve peace and realize its potential.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I am grateful to the Secretary-General for his briefing.

It is an honour to preside over this special meeting of the Security Council on the Middle East. The United Kingdom has convened this meeting for two important reasons. The first is to call for intensified international efforts to support political and economic freedom in the Middle East while respecting the sovereignty of Arab nations. That includes meaningful assistance to Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya and they strive to make a success of their transitions. The second is to call once again for urgent, essential Security Council action to stem the bloodshed in Syria.

The Arab Spring, as it has become known, is already the most significant event of the early twenty-first century, with deep implications for international peace and security. It is therefore right that it is debated by the Security Council. Some people regard it with fear and consternation, but in Britain we view it in a strongly positive light. It raises the prospect of the greatest enlargement of human freedom since the end of the Cold War, and of a Middle East that in 20-years' time could be made up of open, prosperous and stable societies. If this scenario were also to include peace between Israelis and Palestinians — a need underlined by the events in and around Gaza over the past few days — and include a negotiated settlement of the nuclear crisis with Iran, then the case for helping it become a reality is even stronger.

But if, instead, we turn away from the region, if we downgrade our expectations and allow pessimism to prevail, if we send a signal that repression and violence will be tolerated, or if we allow Syria to descend into civil war or to remain convulsed by violence, then immense opportunities will be squandered and some of the worst fears about the region's future could be realized.

We can see today positive developments that seemed unthinkable two years ago — such as in Tunisia, the first democratically elected Parliament since the 1950s, with 24 per cent of the seats held by women; in Libya, a new Government after 40 years of one-man rule; and in Morocco, freer elections under a new Constitution. Some of those countries face immense challenges, and there will be setbacks as well as progress in the years ahead.

But that strengthens the case for helping Arab nations to build their institutions, open up their economies and create strong civil societies, where such assistance is requested. Britain is doing its part in that regard. Our Arab partnership initiative is supporting projects in 10 different countries. The international community can do more on an even greater scale, through international financial institutions, the Group of Eight and regional organizations. The European Union has made a bold offer of support to the region, which must now be implemented in full.

We believe that, as we build on those efforts, we should be guided by three clear principles. The first is that demands for human rights and freedom are universal and will spread by themselves over time, because they are fundamental human aspirations. That is not a new concept; it was enshrined in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly 64 years ago. It is a truth that Governments ignore at their peril. And it is proven by the experience of many countries.

The Arab Spring reconfirms what history warns, that when Governments respond with an iron fist to the irrepressible dreams, legitimate demands and unconquerable hopes of their citizens, they are doomed to fail in the long term. Repression is a policy of failure, and it cannot build stability. All Governments in the region should embrace peaceful reform and make decisive moves in the direction of greater political and economic freedom. If not, we may see more of the violent ruptures that can follow when people demand rights that no amount of coercion will ever persuade them to abandon.

The second fundamental principle is that we cannot dictate change from the outside, nor would we want to. There is no one model of democracy, and so it is for the people of each country in the region to determine their future in accordance with their different cultures, traditions and political systems. But no Government anywhere in the world can justify violence against its people or say that the fundamental democratic principle — the right of citizens to chose and to change their representatives — does not apply in its country.

In Britain we will always stand for that vital principle. And so we must also respect the choices that Arab citizens make through the ballot box. That includes being prepared to work with new elected groups that draw their inspiration from Islam, while holding them to the same high standards of non-violence, respect for human rights and willingness to respect the outcome of future elections that are expected of others.

The third principle is that economic and political reform go hand-in-hand. Economic success is essential to support stability and prosperity. But, equally, there can be no long-term stability without greater political openness.

Finally, the Arab Spring will be the work of a generation. We must show strategic patience in not turning away from the region.

But all those good intentions will count for nothing if we cannot stand by our values or meet our responsibility in the most urgent crisis today. The situation in Syria casts a long shadow over this debate. In the eyes of the overwhelming majority of the world, the Council has so far failed in its responsibilities towards the Syrian people. It has failed to address the brutal oppression of peaceful protesters by the Syrian regime. It has not yet put its weight and authority behind the efforts of the League of Arab States. It is time for the Security Council to show unity and leadership.

It should be possible for the Council to call for an immediate end to the brutal repression and violations of human rights. It should be possible for the Council to demand an end to all violence and to call for immediate and unhindered humanitarian access; to call on the Syrian Government to implement its own commitments to the League of Arab States by stopping military action, withdrawing its forces from towns and cities, releasing all political prisoners and allowing access to the media; to endorse the work of the Arab League and of Kofi Annan in his role as United Nations-Arab League Joint Special Envoy; and to support United Nations and Arab League facilitation of a Syrian-led political transition. I call again on the Council to adopt a resolution containing those essential elements.

Beyond this Chamber, British experts are working in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon to help document crimes against the Syrian people. I urge other nations represented here to join us in that effort so that the regime knows it cannot proceed down its path with impunity.

Not all countries here regard the Arab Spring in the same light, but we have a shared responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, and an immense common interest in working together. That was the very reason the United Nations was first created, and we should act together in that spirit now, not only in stemming bloodshed in Syria but also in long-term support to that vital region.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor the other members of the Security Council.

Mr. Juppé (France) (*spoke in French*): The United Nations Charter entrusts to the Security Council the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The Organization also recognizes the sovereignty of nations and non-interference as fundamental principles. In 2005, the evolution of our work led us to recognize that the Council had the obligation to act when the responsibility to protect was not assured and when gross violations of human rights took place before our eyes, and that Governments were accountable for acts of commission and omission alike.

That is the context in which we hold today's meeting, and I thank the United Kingdom for its initiative in calling it. It is an opportunity for us to consider what the Council can and should do to help make the Arab Spring a force for peace and security in the region and the world.

For more than a year, the Arab world has seen unprecedented sweeping changes. With extraordinary courage Tunisians, Egyptians, Libyans, Yemenis and Syrians have braved oppression to demand their rights. With admirable determination they have arisen to call for their legitimate rights to freedom, human dignity and democracy. France sees that thrust attests to the universal aspiration to democracy, confirming yet again the lessons of history that regimes that squelch their people's voices have no future, and that sooner or later Governments that stifle human rights end up crumbling.

The Security Council would not have known about the situations in question but for the fact that a number of them had degenerated under the obstinacy

of archaic Governments. In Tunisia and Egypt, the people themselves gained the ouster of discredited authorities and the beginnings of democratic processes — not without difficulty, but nevertheless without unleashing bloodbaths. In Jordan and Morocco, the political authorities bravely chose dialogue, reform and elections. I was in Morocco only a few days ago, and that country is a hopeful example for the entire region.

Of course, nothing has been settled once and for all. Of course, as we all know, every democratic revolution carries in itself the risk of disappointment and retrogression. We all know that democratic transitions take time. But history is on the march, and the changes sweeping the Arab world are an opportunity for the region — and for peace.

Libya, meanwhile, was not as fortunate, and the Council's obligation immediately became clear. The Libyan people rose up against a dictator and a regime determined to drown its hopes for freedom in blood. On 26 February 2011, in an expression of universal condemnation, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1970 (2011), imposing sanctions and calling on the International Criminal Court to deal with the brutal repression, which its Prosecutor classified as a crime against humanity. In the face of a dictator threatening to massacre the population of Benghazi, regional organizations, led by the League of Arab States, but also including the African Union, called on the Security Council to act. That was the reason for resolution 1973 (2011), which France fought tirelessly for.

France is proud to have played a part in the adoption of that resolution. We strongly believe that in it the Council collectively made the only right and honourable decision. With that resolution, we saved thousands of lives and protected the Libyan population. Because of it, Benghazi will go down in history not as a town of martyrdom but as a symbol of freedom. I want to affirm unequivocally that to call into question the legitimacy and legality of our actions, and to insinuate that they themselves were tantamount to criminal acts — despite all evidence to the contrary, as the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry confirmed yet again — is an utter distortion of history and an insult to all Libyans who bravely fought to win their freedom. Today, in adopting resolution 2040 (2012) to extend the mandate of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, the Council has continued to shoulder its responsibility for helping the country to build the rule of law and the foundations of its progress towards democracy.

In Yemen, the Council has also met its obligations. The unanimous adoption of resolution 2014 (2011) last October led to a peaceful transfer of power, based on the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council. After months of crises and conflicts, a national unity Government was established, a new President was elected with wide support, and tensions were eased. Of course, not all problems have been solved, but a new era of Yemeni history has dawned. In both cases, the Council acted effectively because it answered not only the calls of populations but also those of regional organizations, which provided clarity and pointed the way to political solutions.

Today, the Council is faced with a tragedy in Syria. For the past year, ever since the first large peaceful demonstration took place in Dar'a on 18 March 2011, the situation has grown more unacceptable every day. Deaf to the voice of its people and to all the appeals of the international community, including those of the Arab League and its close partners, the regime has plunged into ever more bloody repression and ever more brutal violence. That headlong rush has been unequivocally condemned in the strongest possible terms by the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the report of the Commission of Inquiry, whose indictment of the regime is overwhelming, and which again today confirms that crimes against humanity are taking place.

The urgent necessity is clearly to stop the violence and to secure the population's access to humanitarian aid. Ms. Amos will soon give the Council an account of her visit, and she has already said that she is horrified by what she has seen. We are already familiar with the criminal acts, violence and horrors that Syrian civilians live with every day. Like Hama 30 years ago, Homs will live in human history as a town whose martyrdom haunts our memory.

Only a political response to the legitimate hopes of the people and the enactment of the reforms so loudly called for will lead to a resolution of the Syrian crisis. That will be possible by means of a transition based on the plan proposed by the League of Arab States on 22 January, with the broad support of the international community, as evidenced by General Assembly resolution 66/253 of 16 February and the

4 February Security Council vote. No other peaceful solution is possible.

As I stressed before the Human Rights Council a few days ago, the Syrian regime's crimes must not go unpunished. The day will come when that country's civil and military authorities will have to answer for their actions in court. We should set in motion an action by the International Criminal Court.

Let us make no mistake. The Council has a historic responsibility for the crisis in Syria. We have the obligation to put an end to the gross violations of human rights and the downward spiral that threatens the peace in Lebanon and the region. By failing to act, we are abandoning the oppressed to their oppressors and the Syrian people to violence and brutality. Every day we fail to act, we are letting civil war gain yet more ground over a peaceful solution. To be a member of the Council is to be firmly engaged in the cause of world peace and security. It is also to place the common good above all other considerations. It is our responsibility to act — and to act now — to finally put an end to the martyrdom of the Syrian people and allow them to regain control of their own future.

A draft resolution is being discussed to respond to the emergency and to find a credible solution to the ever worsening crisis. I say again today what I said on 31 January (see S/PV.6710). It is unacceptable for the Council to be prevented from assuming its responsibilities. Let us all support Kofi Annan's mission and the Arab League plan. After months of deadlock, I call on China and Russia to heed the voices of the Arab people and the global conscience, and to join us.

Acting in favour of freedom for the Libyan, Yemeni and Syrian peoples puts in sharp relief the issue of the impotence of the Security Council in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the Middle East there is another people whose aspirations must be recognized. Are the claims of the Palestinians not as legitimate as those expressed in the rest of the region? Is it not natural for Palestinians to wish for a Palestinian State to emerge? The security of the Israeli State must also be ensured. France will always stand by Israel to guarantee its security and will not compromise. Today, we all know that the solution of two States living side by side in peace and security is the only viable one and the best guarantee of Israel's security.

After so many repeated failures of the peace process and so many years of suffering and disappointed hopes, the time has come to change method. That is the very direction of the appeal to the General Assembly launched by President Sarkozy on 21 September 2011 (see A/66/PV.11). We are convinced that we can no longer continue to do without a multilateral forum as such, that of the Council, and the support of all partners, in particular regional and European. In the coming months, France will do everything in its power so that a just and lasting peace is at last established in the Middle East.

In talking of peace and security in that region of the world, how can we not mention Iran? In that country, the situation is becoming a little more worrying every day with a regime that is pursuing a nuclear programme that is clearly military, in violation of the decisions of the Council and the International Atomic Energy Agency, that vows to erase Israel from the map, that undermines freedom of movement in the Strait of Hormuz, that is of concern to its neighbours, that oppresses the aspirations of its people to freedom and democracy, and that daily isolates itself a little further from the international community.

The Council has spoken firmly and must remain resolute, as we know that there are two equally unacceptable outcomes: a nuclear Iran or a bombed Iran.

In recalling the peaceful revolutions and developments under way on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, what the tragedy taking place in Syria proves to us is that the principle of legitimacy is fundamental to any Government. The day when a Government loses its legitimacy in the eyes of its people, it is doomed. In that region of the world, one of the major questions being asked is that of the possibility of ensuring that communities and minorities live together in national unity, respectful of the mutual rights of the individual and human rights for all. The promise of the Arab Spring is the universal right to freedom, and I have confidence in its achievement.

Mr. Caballeros (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the United Kingdom for having organized this meeting and we appreciate your gesture, Mr. President, in presiding over it. We are also grateful to the Secretary-General for his presentation to us.

I must say that the theme chosen for our debate today, while captivating, poses a great challenge.

Unlike other very specific topics that we have discussed in the past and that give rise to more or less definite reactions, on this occasion the United Kingdom ha proposed to us a more general topic that runs the risk of diluting any message that we would wish to convey.

It would be presumptuous on our part to offer interpretations on the significance of what has come to be called the Arab Spring, whose model vision, which captured the world's attention, took place in Cairo's Tahrir Square in January 2011. The people's extraordinary courage, their calmness, their solidarity, the persistence of their demands and their peaceful nature, in particular, were a source of inspiration for all humankind. While taking note of the huge difference between those singular events compared to the transitions that occurred in my own region between 1980 and 1990, from authoritarian regimes to democratically elected civilian Governments, I would like to respond to the challenge that you have posed to us, Mr. President, with a brief comment on lessons learned from our own experiences that may contribute some tangible inputs to today's debate. With a certain modesty and aware of the great historical, cultural, religious and political differences existing between our respective regions, even within them, I draw on the changes in my own country to mention seven points.

First, each case in Latin America was unique, and certainly each situation in the Middle East will also be so. For example, in my own country, we faced the need to adopt a project for a multi-ethnic, pluricultural and multilingual nation, responding to the specific realities of Guatemala, which are not necessarily the same as those of other countries in Latin America. That is why, although it sounds trite to say that there are no universally valid formulas for transitions, while democratic values are similar everywhere, their concrete expression in terms of internal organization, juridical and institutional arrangements and forms of popular participation can vary greatly from one situation to another.

Secondly, cultural values matter, in particular in multi-ethnic societies that seek to build a nation where mutual respect and tolerance prevail. Such cultural values must be compatible with democratic societies and commitments to economic and social development. By way of example, it is important that everyone, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, local affiliation, race or creed, has access to the same opportunities. I am pleased to affirm that such values have been established and strengthened in our region, and trust that the same will happen in the countries that are the subject of our debate.

Thirdly, progress is clearly not linear. It is not easy to build plural and participatory systems of governance where there is no fully established democratic culture. It requires the strengthening, and sometimes the creation, of institutions in various areas, including a firm constitutional and legal basis, the development of representative political parties and the guarantee of freedom of expression. The agenda is complex. It involves vested interests, often gives rise to unforeseen consequences and from time to time requires changes of direction. What is important is to persevere and trust that age-old cultures that have contributed so much to the civilized world will find the strength, creativity and leadership to bring their democratization to fruition.

That brings me to my fourth point. Democratization processes must respond to the aspirations, and have the consent of, the peoples and national societies concerned. They must be the product of a sense of ownership akin to national consensus, not something imposed from outside. Achieving a model with which the citizenship feels comfortable often involves long periods of trial and adjustment, which only confirms my previous points that we are dealing with long-term processes. Those processes only respond to the wishes of their own citizens. Also, representative democracy requires that citizens have confidence in the Governments that they elect.

Fifthly, today it is fashionable in the United Nations to talk about the rule of law — a topic that did not figure as prominently on our agenda a few years ago. From the perspective of my own country, I would like to affirm the crucial importance of having solid institutions that combat impunity and lack of transparency in the management of public finances and, in general, the administration of justice. We foresaw that in our peace accords, but state it more directly in addressing the threat posed to the rule of law in our country by the appearance of transnational criminal cartels. Combating that scourge requires strengthening our capacity in criminal prosecution, our judicial system, our civil police and even our prison system. The same will certainly be true for the democratization processes under way in the Middle East.

Sixthly, in the case of Latin America, in general, and Central America, in particular, the transition to democracy was accompanied by a strong boost to interregional cooperation. The emergence of Governments with shared values facilitated agreements and fostered regionalism. In our case, cooperating to resolve common problems and promoting mutual support strengthened democracy in each country and contributed to its joint defence. We believe that that phenomenon of cooperation is relevant to the countries that are the subject of our debate today, which is already taking shape in the increasing role played by the League of Arab States.

Lastly, let us not forget the imperative of promoting economic and social development. It is true that people seek freedom and dignity, but they also demand greater well-being, in particular in societies marked by high levels of inequality. It is interesting to note that, in accordance with the main source of public opinion polling in our region, Latinobarómetro, there is a close correlation between economic performance and the level of satisfaction with democracy. Seemingly, the population not only aspires but also demands that more plural and representative Governments generate tangible benefits for the citizens. When that does not happen, the rate of satisfaction with democratic institutions falls dramatically.

The so-called Arab Spring evokes feelings that are, overall, of a positive nature. That is why I have concentrated more on the opportunities than on the challenges in my statement. That is also why I have deliberately avoided touching on other topics that some would consider obligatory when discussing the Middle East, such as the imperative of ending the conflict between Israel and Palestine or the situation in Syria, since we have addressed those matters in other meetings of the Council.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The transformation processes that have agitated the Middle East and North Africa reflect the understandable aspirations of the peoples of those countries, which deserve our support, for a better life, increased opportunities for self-expression, participation in political life and greater economic and social benefits. Those processes are still far from over, and it is difficult to make clear predictions about their prospects, since sometimes they are accompanied by painful civilizational, ethnic, religious, economic and political rifts that create problems in terms of regional security.

The goal for the international community is to help ensure that those transformations do more good than harm to the Arab world. The priority is to ensure that the changes are peaceful and democratic and that fundamental freedoms, human rights and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, including, of course, the rights of Christians, are respected. We follow with empathy the process of democratic State-building in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco; the efforts of the Government of Yemen to stabilize the situation in combating terrorism; and the efforts of the transitional Government of Libya to restore normal life to the country, prepare for elections and disarm insurgent groups. We are providing valued humanitarian assistance and stand ready to help in economic recovery. For all members of the Council, the international dimension of the continued Arab Spring is of primary interest.

We believe that we can already draw some conclusions. First of all, whatever goals might be set in any given situation, they cannot be achieved by misleading the international community or manipulating Security Council decisions. Otherwise, the credibility of the Council is diminished and trust among its members eroded, which undermines the ability of the Council to take decisions in the future.

Secondly, those organizations or countries that take it upon themselves to implement Security Council mandates must give a full account of their actions to the Council. That also applies to NATO, which, as all members know, offered to secure a no-fly zone in Libya, but in reality engaged in massive bombings. It is sad that there has as yet been no investigation following up information about civilian casualties caused by those bombings. We believe that the Secretary-General should bring clarity to the matter by invoking the 2008 Joint Declaration on United Nations/NATO Secretariat Cooperation.

Thirdly, interference from the outside using brute military force increases the threat of the illicit spread of arms, thus jeopardizing the stability of the region. We will need to take serious decisions regarding the situation in Syria. It remains a cause for grave concern to Russia and the entire international community. Making hasty demands for regime change, imposing unilateral sanctions designed to trigger economic difficulties and social tensions in the country, inducing the opposition to continue its confrontation with authorities instead of promoting dialogue, and calling

for support of armed confrontation and even for foreign military intervention are all risky recipes for geopolitical engineering that can only result in the spread of conflict.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the Syrian authorities bear a huge share of responsibility for the current situation. But one should not ignore the fact that for a long time now they have been fighting not unarmed men, but combat units, including the so-called Free Syrian Army and extremist groups, including Al-Qaida, which have recently committed a series of murderous terrorist acts. If our absolute priority and sincere wish is to immediately put an end to the violence and provide humanitarian assistance to the civilian population, then at this stage we should not be talking about who started the conflict, but rather discuss realistic and feasible approaches that would allow us to achieve a ceasefire as a priority.

From the outset our approach has been clear and consistent, aimed at finding an early solution to the Syrian crisis without violence, through Syrian-led inclusive political dialogue and the implementation of long-due reforms. The following five principles of settlement that Russia and the League of Arab States agreed upon on 10 March are based on that same spirit: first, the end of violence on the part of all sides; secondly, an impartial monitoring mechanism; thirdly, no outside interference; fourthly, unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance to all Syrians; and, fifthly, strong support for Kofi Annan's mission aimed at launching political dialogue between the Government and all opposition groups, as mandated by the terms of reference endorsed by the Secretary-General and the Arab League. On that basis, we are prepared to agree to a Security Council resolution, as we were ready to do last autumn when our draft resolution was put forth. Sadly, it was not supported by all Security Council members.

The Arab Spring should in no way be used as a pretext to diminish attention to the Palestinian issue. We are convinced that the potential for conflict in the Middle East and North Africa will remain high until a comprehensive settlement is achieved in the Middle East within the existing international legal framework. This is a truly historic obligation for the international community and the Security Council.

Unfortunately, the trends we have been witnessing lately delay rather than hasten this prospect, both in political terms — when the settlement parameters that have been repeatedly endorsed by the Security Council, the Quartet and the parties themselves are called into question — and in practical terms too, when the settlement activity of Israel in the West Bank is literally shrinking the area available for the necessary agreements.

A particular concern is the violation of the ceasefire following the resurgence in strikes between Israel and the Gaza Strip, in which civilians are suffering on both sides. Under those circumstances, the international community must step up its efforts. That applies above all to the Quartet, which, as we discussed with our colleagues before the start of today's meeting, should start working in a focused manner and on a regular basis to create an environment conducive to continuing direct Israeli-Palestinian contacts aimed at full-fledged negotiations. We all welcome the initiative of Jordan, which held a series of very useful meetings between the Israelis and the Palestinians in Amman this January, and we want that initiative to be continued.

Russia also confirms our proposal for closer cooperation between the Quartet and the relevant structures of the League of Arab States. We are confident that the Arab Peace Initiative remains relevant and that its comprehensive implementation will ensure the creation of a Palestinian State, guarantee the security of Israel and establish peace and stability throughout the Middle East. Russia is prepared to engage in close cooperation with all responsible members of the international community in order to attain those goals.

Mrs. Rodham Clinton (United States of America): Today we gather to discuss the wave of change that has swept the Middle East and North Africa. While each country's experience has been unique, all of those democratic movements have sprung from a common desire for rights, freedom, economic hope and human dignity. Those universal aspirations are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Charter of the United Nations, and they are fundamental to my country's identity and history and to those of many countries. Those principles and the people who struggle to realize them in their own societies deserve and demand our collective support. We are inspired by the courage of the people of the region, as they have shown their

determination to move forward, and we believe that their efforts should be supported.

Now I approach these conversations with a healthy dose of humility, because we know that those revolutions are not ours. They are not by us, for us or against us. But we also know that as the international community, we have the resources and capabilities to support those who seek peaceful, meaningful democratic change. We must also have the will.

Of course, change is unfolding in different ways and in different places, and in each unique case our tools have to be matched with the circumstances. Here at the Security Council, three cases in particular demand our attention today. Let me start with Libya and the encouraging vote this morning (see S/PV.6733) to renew and update the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. Last year the Council, backed by the Arab League and countries around the world, acted to support the Libyan people at the hour of their greatest need. Today's vote reflects our continued commitment to Libya and its transitional Government, which has made tremendous strides. It also reflects the recognition that our work is not yet done.

We will continue to aid UNSMIL's efforts to support the Libyan Government as it reintegrates those who took up arms in the name of change into a professional national army and a peaceful society. We will continue helping Libya secure its borders against proliferation, trafficking and extremism, while treating refugees and migrants humanely. After so much courage and sacrifice from the Libyan people, we are proud to help Libya build a new foundation for the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Just last week, Prime Minister El-Keib was here in the Security Council (see S/PV.6731), where he forcefully and eloquently defended the Security Council's assistance on behalf of the aspirations of the Libyan people to chart their own futures.

I do not think there is any additional comment that any of us need to add to the record as to the appropriate measures taken by the Security Council in furtherance of the resolutions authorizing action. We also met with Prime Minister El-Keib in Washington, D.C., where we discussed Libya's progress in paving the way for fair and free elections, as well as our work together on security, student exchanges, civil society and medical care for Libya's war-wounded. Ultimate success for Libya will not be the death of a dictator, but the birth of a successful, stable and free nation.

The second case is Yemen. As Yemen unravelled into violence last year, the Security Council stood behind the efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Yemeni stakeholders to find a peaceful solution. In the face of setbacks, we held firm.

Many challenges lie ahead. But last month's successful presidential election and inauguration were promising steps on the path towards a new democratic chapter in Yemen's history. As Yemen continues its multi-year transition, reforms its Constitution, convenes a national dialogue and continues to grapple with its security and humanitarian challenges, we must remain engaged and supportive.

The third case is Syria. Five weeks ago, the Council was unable to stand united against the horrific campaign of violence that has shocked the conscience of the world — one that continues unabated as we meet. We were blocked from even condemning the violence and endorsing a peaceful plan developed by Syria's own neighbours.

The United States believes firmly in the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all Member States. But we do not believe that sovereignty demands that the Council stand silent when Governments massacre their own people, threatening regional peace and security in the process. We reject any equivalence between premeditated murders by a Government's military regime and the actions of civilians under siege who have been driven to self-defence. How cynical it was to see that even as Al-Assad was receiving former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Syrian army was conducting a fresh assault on Idlib and continuing its aggression in Hamah, Homs and Rastan.

We took note of the fact that this past weekend, in Cairo, the Arab League and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov agreed on the need for an end of violence, for full, unimpeded humanitarian access and for a political process led by Kofi Annan and based on the terms of the Arab League and General Assembly resolutions.

We believe that now is the time for all nations, even those that have previously blocked our efforts, to stand behind the humanitarian and political approach spelled out by the Arab League. The international community should say with one voice, without hesitation or caveat, that the killings of innocent

Syrians must stop and a political transition must begin. The Syrian people deserve the same opportunity to shape their future that the Tunisians, Egyptians, Libyans and Yemenis now enjoy. Our work here in the Security Council is just one part of what the international community must do to assist democratic transitions all across the Middle East and North Africa.

We must support calls from within the region to strengthen each of the building blocks of stable, thriving societies: a responsive, accountable Government, an energetic, effective economy and a vibrant civil society. Politically, many countries, including a number seated at this table, have unique, first-hand expertise in how to build durable democracies. And I appreciate the comments of the Foreign Minister of Guatemala. Those are lessons we can and should share.

Where countries are making gradual reforms, we should offer our support and everywhere we must safeguard, in word and action, the basic principles of democracy and universal human rights.

I know that today there are those who question whether Islamist politics can really be compatible with democratic and universal principles and rights. The people of the Arab Spring have a chance to answer that question. Our policy is to focus less on what names parties call themselves by and more on what they choose to do. All political parties, religious and secular alike, have a responsibility to their people to abide by the basic tenets upon which this body is founded: to reject violence; to uphold the rule of law; to respect the freedoms of speech, association and assembly; to safeguard religious freedom and tolerance; to protect the rights of women and minorities; to establish independent judiciaries; to promote a free press; to surrender power if defeated at the polls; and to avoid inciting conflicts that pull societies apart. Those are standards against which we should all be measured, and we need to commit to upholding them together.

Our experience elsewhere in the world has taught us that successful political transitions are those that quickly deliver economic results, especially job opportunities and the hope for a better future. To succeed, the Arab political awakening must also be an economic awakening.

Governments across the region that share those priorities will need to keep making the sometimes difficult policy choices required to build a foundation for inclusive, private sector-led growth.

As President of this year's Group of Eight, America is continuing the work of the Deauville Partnership, which was started by France, to promote regional integration, economic participation, job creation and stabilization.

The last of these is especially pressing. The international community must provide strong support for the International Monetary Fund so as to quickly conclude an economic reform and stabilization programme with Egypt. We call on Egypt's friends in the region and around the world to be prepared to use bilateral assistance to reinforce an IMF programme with Egypt. Those efforts, both economic and political, must, of course, include women. I thank the Secretary-General for making that one of the five points he cited. No transition can succeed with half of the population left behind.

Durable democracy depends on civil society, and we are proud to support individuals and organizations seeking to improve their own societies.

Again, I know that there are those who say that the concept of civil society is a Western imposition. But after 2011, how can anyone honestly say that civil society is not indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa and, I would add, everywhere. We know that lasting change comes from within. Societies must be the authors of their own futures. But the international community can provide tools that will help societies reach those goals.

As new elected legislatures abolish old laws intended to control civil liberties, we should continue our collective support for measures that will protect and nurture civil society, consistent with the international human rights norms of free association, assembly and expression. No one in the region is exempt from the demands for change we have seen. When a country like Iran claims to champion those principles in the region and then brutally suppresses its own people and supports suppression in Syria and other places, its hypocrisy is clear to all.

President Obama and I have been consistent in our belief that the Palestinian people, like their Arab neighbours, Israelis and all people, deserve dignity, liberty and the right to decide their own future. They deserve a viable, independent Palestine alongside a

secure Israel. We know from decades in the diplomatic trenches that the only way to get there is through a negotiated peace, one that cannot be dictated from outside and one that we will continue to pursue through every productive avenue, including a Quartet consultation this morning.

Let me also condemn in the strongest terms the rocket fire from Gaza into southern Israel, which continued over the weekend. We call on those responsible to take immediate action to stop those attacks. We call on both sides — all sides — to make every effort to restore calm.

Finally and crucially, we have to recognize that the most consequential choices are the ones that will be faced in the months ahead. It is up to the people and leaders of the region to resist the calls of demagogues, to compromise and build coalitions, to keep faith in their system even when they lose at the polls, and to protect the principles and institutions that ultimately will protect them. Every democracy has to guard against those who would hijack its freedoms for their own ignoble ends. Building prosperous democratic societies is not the job of a day, a week or even a year. It is a continuous commitment and one we share. We as a community of nations must help the people of the Middle East and North Africa to make the most of the rights and freedoms for which they have risked so much.

Mr. Portas (Portugal): Thank you, Sir, for organizing this very important, appropriate and timely debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his important statement.

The popular uprisings that led to the so-called Arab Spring represent the most powerful transformation in world politics since the fall of the Berlin wall. Although unpredicted, those changes prove an old rule of politics — failure to reform leads to revolution. Political leaderships that lose the sense of history are bound to be on the wrong side of history. For too long, the world condoned autocratic regimes, looked away from the repression of their own citizens, and turned a deaf ear to the calls for freedom and for the respect of basic human rights.

The upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt shook the foundations of that paradigm, and the notorious massacre in Benghazi stirred the international community into action in defence of the values and objectives of the United Nations. Those were popular-led processes. Coming 10 years after 9/11, they were not instigated from the outside, or by Al-Qaida, which is politically very significant.

What is happening across the Arab world offers a unique opportunity both for the countries of the region and for the world at large. Those countries have the chance to elect democratic Governments, foster the rule of law, protect and promote human rights, value the role of women, respect minorities and achieve widespread economic and social progress.

The international community must also seize this opportunity to advance the principles of the United Nations that we all share, and thus to strengthen the conditions for a more peaceful, prosperous and stable international order. In order to do so, we must be clear in our aims and principles, while striving to avoid old mistakes. Let me mention some of the principles that frame Portugal's perspective.

First, continued ownership of the process by the peoples concerned is essential. We are witnessing home-grown, popular-led processes that are the result of the courage and the will for change of those societies. We should be humbled by their example and we should listen, understand and offer our help where and when support is required from us.

Secondly, each country is an individual case and must respond to different challenges. We must recognize existing differences. There is no one-size-fits-all model.

Thirdly, we must resist the temptation to try to export political models. Human rights are universal; political models are specific. It is up to voters in each country to choose their own future, and we must accept without reservation the results of credible, fair and transparent electoral processes.

Fourthly, we must recognize the participation of Islamic parties in Governments as natural to the political process. In democratic societies, parties will be judged by the people according to their performance and capacity to deliver on the expectations of their citizens.

Fifthly, religious freedom is essential to human dignity. We must not judge others on the basis of our own religious, social or cultural beliefs, and we expect the same from others. We must distinguish faith from fanaticism.

Sixthly, building a democratic society takes time and patience. It is a path paved with tensions and often with contradictions. We Portuguese learned that through our own experience some decades ago.

Finally, the broad institutional, cultural, ethnic and spiritual diversity of several of the societies currently experiencing such historical and profound change may give rise to specific tensions and security concerns. Therefore, the social cohesion and territorial integrity of those countries must be constantly at the forefront of our concerns.

Regrettably and flagrantly, one country has become a tragedy: Syria. As in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya or Yemen, the Syrian people peacefully demanded the legitimate fulfilment of their basic rights. Nevertheless, as we speak, the ruthless campaign of repression against the civilian population of Syria is continuing. For a year now, women, men and children have been massively and indiscriminately killed by their own State security forces. Human rights, including the basic right to humanitarian assistance, are being systematically violated on a large scale.

The international community has clearly voiced its strong condemnation of those actions through the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the Group of Friends of Syria, which enjoys large and widespread participation. Al-Assad's regime remains deaf to all those calls. Reforms were promised; none was credibly implemented.

We regret that the Security Council has not yet been able to take a forceful, unified position to end the violence and make way for a Syrian-led political process reflecting the Arab League proposals. How many more thousands of dead will it take for the Council to meet its responsibilities? How long will we sit silent while the Syrian regime pushes the country into bloody sectarian conflict and civil war?

The unprecedented appointment of Mr. Kofi Annan, a former Secretary-General and a Nobel laureate, as Joint Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States represents the will of the international community to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people. His mission represents the last opportunity to prevent Syria from spiralling into civil war.

I therefore urge the Council and appeal to all its members to unite in public and full support of Mr. Annan and the objectives he has outlined, in accordance with the General Assembly resolution (resolution 66/253) for an end to all violence, full access to humanitarian aid and the launching of a Syrian-led inclusive political process.

The profound changes taking place around the Arab world render the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian question even more urgent. Palestinians have the right to their independent State, living in peace and security alongside Israel. Palestinians have prepared themselves to fully and efficiently run their own State, and that has been acknowledged by the international community at large. Fulfilling the legitimate ambitions of both sides can only be attained through serious and credible negotiations between the two parties that take into account the rightful concerns of each side.

We all know that the solution lies in the framework of the parameters; what is lacking is political will. We need concrete and tangible actions that bring Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiation table to engage in the substance and to accept a precise calendar, as proposed by the Quartet on the Middle East and the Arab Peace Initiative. Europeans have a particular responsibility in this context, and we must play an active role to break the present deadlock. Tensions are mounting and time is quickly running out. If a new surge in violence is to be avoided, both parties and the international community must act promptly.

Rampant settlement activity, demolitions of Palestinian homes and displacement of innocent people continue. They are illegal. They undermine the Palestinian institutions and leaders. They increase frustration and create an explosive mix. We appeal to Israel to stop those activities, as they fatally threaten the viability of any mutually agreed political solution. Israel has legitimate security concerns, but they can only be fully addressed in an efficient way through a negotiated settlement.

Portugal is committed to working together with our Arab neighbours and friends, to whom we are linked by centuries of mutual acquaintance, shared history and common purpose. We will do it bilaterally and within the framework of the United Nations and the European Union. The work ahead is immense but I

believe that, collectively, we will prevail in on path to freedom, justice and democracy.

Mr. Westerwelle (Germany): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this initiative and for your leadership. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Change has come to the Arab world. It has come because the peoples in the region, especially the youth, have stood up for freedom, participation and dignity. I want to congratulate the peoples of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, as well as those of Morocco, Yemen and Jordan, on the progress they have made, each in their own way.

The League of Arab States has responded to calls for reform. We applaud the constructive role it has played over the past 12 months.

The changes in the Arab world reflect a beginning globalization of values. People all over the world are demanding their universal human rights. The values of the United Nations are gaining ground. We are still only at the beginning but, in the long term, all the people of the region will benefit. And so will we, as their neighbours in the European Union. As neighbours, we are ready to help.

Germany took an early decision to assist the countries in transition. Our support is guided by three principles. First, reform must come from within. We stand ready to support countries that choose democratic change. Secondly, no two countries in the Arab world are alike. Each country must choose its own path and find its own pace. Finally, we know that the road to democracy is not linear. It is a difficult passage, which requires patience and persistence.

Liberty and democracy require a promising economic perspective. We have offered transformation partnerships to all countries in question. We stand ready to support them with know-how, investments and open markets in Europe. A focus of our international support should be on education. A good education for the youth is the key for any future economic success.

Many in the West fear the rise of political Islam. But the notion that Islam and democracy are incompatible is wrong. We have engaged in dialogue with democratic Islamic parties.

We are ready to respect cultural transitions. At the same time, we are looking for clear commitments to human rights and to the rule of law, to a pluralistic society, to respect for minorities, to religious tolerance and to domestic and external peace.

Women have been a driving force for change in the region; we urge all partners in transition to strengthen their rights.

The changes in the region have made it even more urgent to make progress towards a two-State solution for Israel and Palestine. I therefore welcome the meeting of the Quartet principals today. All parties must do everything to ease tensions and to avoid an escalation on the ground. I am deeply worried about the flare up of violence around Gaza. The shelling with rockets of innocent people is unacceptable and must stop.

The Iranian nuclear programme challenges the stability of the region and the international non-proliferation regime. A nuclear-armed Iran is not acceptable.

The E3+3 and Iran have expressed their willingness to engage in talks. We want, and we work for, a political and diplomatic solution. There is still time for diplomacy. Irrespective of the nuclear issue, we will not forget how the Iranian regime has failed to respond the legitimate demands of its people.

In Yemen, the election of President Al-Hadi marks an important milestone in the political transition. I visited Sana'a two days ago. Yemen continues to face tremendous challenges, but it is in a much better situation today than it was a year ago. Today, there is a genuine chance to achieve national reconciliation. The people of Yemen deserve our full support.

We are all grateful for the peaceful transfer of power. The Gulf Cooperation Council played a key role. So did the Security Council and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Those joint efforts made the Yemeni-led transition process possible. In many regards, the case of Yemen may serve as a model for political transition and for conflict resolution for this Council.

This week marks an anniversary for the beginning of peaceful protests in Syria. From the start, Germany has called for the Security Council to act. There has been much discussion on Syria in the Chamber, but the Council has failed to live up to its responsibility. Peaceful protest has been put down with horrific violence and murder. Among the 8,000 dead,

there are hundreds of children. That violence must end, and it must end now.

We have been watching with admiration the growing number of Syrians who risk life and limb every day for a better future. The people in Syria overcome fear every day, in the face of overwhelming repression and violence. Their courage arises from both hope and despair. Let us here in the Security Council give them more reason for hope than for despair.

Germany has been working tirelessly for a political solution. We must prevent further escalation. Too much time has been wasted. We see three priorities: first, an end to violence; secondly, immediate and unhindered access for humanitarian aid; and thirdly, a process of peaceful transition led by the Syrians and based on the decisions of the Arab League.

It is my firm conviction that only the Syrian people themselves can decide their future. They have been expressing their will throughout the past 12 months, and no one can doubt their desire for change. We extend our hand to all those working for peaceful and democratic change, in particular the Syrian National Council. In a new Syria, all Syrians must be able to enjoy their full rights regardless of affiliation, ethnicity, belief or gender.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Arab League, Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay, and Ms. Valerie Amos for their untiring efforts. Germany will continue to push for action in the Council, in other United Nations bodies, in the European Union and with like-minded partners in the Group of Friends of the Syrian People. Sending a strong signal and taking effective action is what we owe to the people of Syria. We owe it to the people, to the children, to the families, and to the victims. Upon it depends the credibility of the Council; it is the only way the Council can live up to its responsibility under the Charter.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I wish to begin by thanking the United Kingdom for having organized today's debate, which provides us with a special opportunity to consider the situation in the Middle East through the prism of the demands of the people and the changes taking place there. I should like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and welcome the presence of Ministers who, by travelling here today, have demonstrated the importance they attribute to the matter before us.

A little more than a year ago, reacting to a police officer's action that could be described as unremarkable, a young Tunisian chose to set himself on fire in order to express his anger, or rather his despair, at continuing to live in a society where inequality was increasingly prevalent and where shameless displays of wealth existed side by side with rampant poverty.

That act was the trigger for the far-reaching change that is shaking several Arab States. In fact, it was a revolution comparable to the French Revolution of 1789, which Hegel described as a splendid dawn. From Tunisia to Bahrain, from Egypt to Libya to Yemen and Syria, young people rose up with a single voice to demand more justice, more equality and a better distribution of the wealth of their countries. They were asking, in a word, for democracy.

Surprised by the scope of the unprecedented rebellion, some Heads of State were forced out of power. However, that was not enough to re-establish calm because, in reality, the aim of the youth movement was the establishment of a new democratic society. While a leader may be ousted in a few months, establishing such a democratic society requires more time and greater sacrifices.

The challenges of the current situation in the Middle East are legion, but they also provide major opportunities for the peoples of the region. The challenges involve rebuilding countries where justice, equality and human rights will now be the cornerstones. From that point of view, re-establishing peace, security and national unity are the first challenges to be met. The situation is complicated further by the uncontrolled movement of weapons, the emergence of armed militias, acts of vengeance and the settlement of accounts, refusal to disarm — all of which exacerbate insecurity and the lack of stability in the countries and regions involved.

Another challenge to be met is the humanitarian. In countries where revolution has taken place, thousands of people have had to flee their homes and seek refuge in the interior of their countries or in neighbouring countries. The situation calls for emergency humanitarian aid, which is not always easy to mobilize or deploy in isolated areas where access is difficult. This is where the concept of the responsibility

to protect comes in. The concept must be clearly defined so that it may be implemented in situations where human rights are violated on a massive scale.

Beyond those challenges, it must be said that the convulsions in the Arab world offer opportunities. These include, most importantly, freedom of expression, the ability of people to choose their leaders, and the participation of all stakeholders in society in the management of public affairs. The revolutions in the Middle East remind us of the importance of establishing good economic and political governance to foster development.

Because such revolutions arise from unemployment among highly educated and trained young people, uncontrolled poverty, soaring commodity prices, the failures of systems of justice, the abuse of power and corruption, they offer opportunities to the new leaders of the countries in question and elsewhere to position the human being at the heart of development. They must work in a spirit of openness and complementarity in order to create conditions conducive to development.

However, new democratic countries and those on the way to becoming democratic cannot rebuild alone. They must be assisted with substantial economic aid that can help them to offer their societies a new way of life in which young people no longer have to resort to acts of despair. Indeed, building democratic societies must go hand in hand with better living conditions for people. The claims of the people of the Arab world have now become part of history. Like any impetus for freedom, they are a wager, and like any wager, they must be well supported.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for having organized today's ministerial-level discussion of the challenges confronting the Middle East and the opportunities being offered to its peoples to live in dignity, peace, stability, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. We also welcome the attendance and participation of Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon in today's meeting.

The changes that the Arab region has seen recently have launched a new era in which the peoples of the region have regained their ability to control their destiny, influence political decision-making and contribute to building their present and their future. The changes have been diverse in scope, depth and methodology. They have engendered many advantages and gains, the most important of which is the birth of genuine hope that the past has been overcome and that a future awaits in which all sectors and strata of society shall participate in the building of institutions that respect the will of people and involve them in the founding of democracy.

No one should underestimate the challenges facing the Middle East. In discussing those challenges, we cannot fail to tackle the crisis that has cast a dark shadow across the entire region and has dangerously escalated in recent days. The greatest and most dangerous threat to the stability and security of the Middle East is embodied in the policy of occupation and settlement that Israel continues to espouse, in violation of international legitimacy, signed agreements and the founding principles of the peace process.

The dead end reached in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, despite repeated international efforts, and Israel's continued acceleration of its settlement activities, especially in Jerusalem, the construction of the wall and the siege of the Gaza Strip have bred frustration and despair that threaten the security and stability of the entire region. The immediate and urgent challenge facing the Security Council is the creation of openings to resume negotiations and moving them towards a just and comprehensive solution, which it must seek to achieve as soon as possible.

The international community, and particularly influential States thereof, has a big and decisive role to play in influencing the parties and activating the two-State solution in the context of a just, comprehensive and full peace that would guarantee the emergence of a viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the entrenchment of peace and security for peoples throughout the region, without exception.

In the Arab Maghreb region, a new dawn has broken over sisterly Tunisia and the wheel of change has turned towards democracy and a State of legal institutions, with the participation of all sectors of society. Tunisia has become a new and active participant in building the Arab Maghreb coalition that we all desire.

As for sisterly Libya, and regardless of the difficulties and challenges facing its Arab Maghreb people in their transition, no one can deny that the Libyan people are now much better off than they have

been at any time during the past 40 years. They are now endowed with the resolve, resources and skills that will allow Libya to turn a new leaf in its modern history and build a democratic State that is unified and consolidated. The Libyan people have emerged victorious and liberated, thanks not only to the courage and resolve they displayed in trying times, but also to the unwavering and timely support of the international community, and especially the League of Arab States and the Security Council.

It is with great optimism and determination to overcome all obstacles that the brotherly Egyptian people are moving forward through a series of transformations endorsed by their national forces. We trust that the genius and history of that people will enable them to resolve all difficulties and to achieve their aspirations to liberty, democracy and social justice.

In that regard, we welcome the peaceful approach adopted by sisterly Yemen in order to ensure the organized transfer of power pursuant to the successful implementation of the initiative of the Arab Gulf countries, with United Nations assistance.

At the same time, we regret the tragedy endured by the brotherly Syrian people over the past year, which threatens to erupt into a civil war with unwelcome consequences. Morocco welcomes the appointment of Mr. Kofi Annan as Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League. We hope that his efforts will contribute to halting the violence, facilitating humanitarian access, and laying the necessary groundwork for launching a national dialogue with a view to implementing the Arab resolutions and guaranteeing the territorial integrity and unity of sisterly Syria. Morocco reiterates that the Council must speak with one voice in addressing the situation by implementing the relevant resolutions of the Arab League.

The reforms launched in Morocco more than 10 years ago under the leadership of His Majesty Mohammed VI have given historic momentum to the drive towards democracy and the democratic progress that the Kingdom has already achieved. They have also contributed to creating more individual and collective freedoms. On the basis of strictly internal dynamics born of national political resolve, Morocco has adopted important measures, including profound constitutional reforms, and held transparent elections leading to the formation of a new Government committed to combating corruption, reforming the judiciary and focusing on the enhancement of women's role in all fields. We are ready to continue sharing our experience with our brethren in all fields of endeavour, including political pluralism, the role of civil society and capacity-building in the service of a State of law and order.

Whatever its internal capacities, no State of our region can stand along against the challenges of terrorism, secession and development, or guarantee openness and democracy. Any national effort and outcome will therefore be limited if not complemented and nourished by regional cooperation based on shared history, current needs, and aspirations to a common future. Such cooperation would strengthen the people of the region, enabling them to achieve economic integration to the benefit of all States. That is what we hope to accomplish in the Arab Maghreb region, which has seen positive and unprecedented movement in recent months that is cause for optimism. We will work tirelessly to maintain these dynamics in order to confront many of the challenges we continue to face and the dangerous threats to our security and territorial integrity. We hope that these efforts will enjoy the active support of all countries of the region.

In closing, no one can underestimate the difficulties and obstacles to be surmounted in achieving the objectives of democratic transition. Similarly, no one should underestimate the energy of the Arab peoples or their ability to overcome these challenges, each according to its own specificities, historical assets, and particular experience. The road towards strengthening and building democracy is long and wearisome and calls for wisdom and foresight in entrenching the foundations of stability, without which true democratic in titutions and structures cannot be established. The international community has a great responsibility and role to play in guaranteeing the success of these efforts and in offering support and encouragement of all kinds throughout every stage of democratic transition. We hope that the international community will not disappoint the peoples who are waiting for and aspiring to that transition.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the presence of Mr. William Hague, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, to preside over today's

meeting. I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his statement.

The situation in the Middle East is undergoing unprecedented changes. In some countries the situation is turbulent. That has of course caused widespread concern throughout the world. Developments in the situation in the Middle East have a major impact on world political and economic affairs. Without stability and development in that region, the recovery of the world economy will remain elusive and world peace will remain in serious jeopardy.

At a time when the consequences of the international economic and financial crisis are still being felt, the people of the Middle East and North Africa, like the people of other regions of the world, also have demands for change and for the safeguarding of their self-interests. The reasons for the turbulence and changes in the Middle East and North Africa are multifaceted. In order to properly address those changes, we must engage in rational thinking and adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensure the peace and stability of the region, in order that the people's demands will be met in a better and more orderly fashion.

I should like to focus on four points. First, we must respect the desires and demands of the peoples of the countries concerned for change and development, as well as respect their ownership over the management of their internal affairs and selecting their political systems and routes to development. The primary responsibility for resolving issues in the Middle East lies with the people of the Middle East themselves. They are the masters of their own destiny.

Secondly, we hope that countries of the region will express their political aspirations through legal and non-violent means, resolve their differences through dialogue, consultation and other peaceful means, and achieve proper solutions through inclusive political processes. We call on all parties to avoid violence and military conflict and to restore stability and normal social order as soon as possible.

Thirdly, we must adhere to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the basic norms governing international relations, and respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the countries of the region. The international community can provide necessary constructive assistance for the efforts of countries to solve their internal crises through political means. China is against any attempt by external forces to engage in military intervention or push for regime change. Sanctions or the threat thereof are not conducive to a proper solution of these problems.

Fourthly, Security Council resolutions must be strictly and comprehensively implemented. No party is to interpret them in any way it wants, let alone take action that exceeds Council mandates. The protection of civilians must follow international humanitarian law and other related international law, without any political motivations or purposes. China is against any interference in internal affairs in the name of humanitarianism.

As always, China remains firmly committed to just Arab causes, including the just demands of the Palestinian people for the restoration of their legitimate national rights. China supports the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with full sovereignty and independence, with East Jerusalem as its capital and with eventual peaceful coexistence between the two countries of Palestine and Israel.

The peace process in the Middle East is currently at a stalemate. There was another increase in tension in Gaza last week. China is deeply worried about that development. Any stagnation or setback to the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks can only bring about more turbulence and conflict. The more conflict there is and the more grim the situation becomes, the more that the international community should intensify its diplomatic efforts and push for an early resumption of talks between the two parties. China appreciates the efforts made by the Middle East Quartet. We support a greater role by Mr. Annan in achieving peace in the Middle East.

China recently put forward a six-point proposal for a solution to the Syrian issue. We call on the Syrian Government and all parties concerned to cease all violence, immediately launch an inclusive political dialogue, and adopt through consultations, and put into practice as soon as possible, a detailed and comprehensive reform road map and time frame. The parties concerned in the international community must respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, and create conditions for talks among the Syrian political parties.

The crisis in Syria is very complex. Political mediation efforts will not succeed overnight. But we

must persevere with tireless efforts. To that end, China has repeatedly deployed special envoys to engage with Syrian parties and to push for political talks.

China supports a constructive role by United Nations-League of Arab States Joint Special Envoy Annan in finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis. We support the vigorous efforts by Arab countries and the Arab League in promoting a political settlement in the Syrian crisis. We value and welcome Mr. Annan's recent visit to Syria. We call on the international community to create and support favourable conditions for Mr. Annan's good offices.

No Chinese self-interests are involved on the issue of Syria. We do not favour any particular party, nor do we go out our way to oppose any party. China adheres to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respects Syrian's sovereignty and the choices of the Syrian people. No external parties should engage in military intervention in Syria or push for regime change.

China supports a leading role by the United Nations in coordinating humanitarian relief to help to alleviate the humanitarian situation in some regions of Syria. Through the International Committee of the Red Cross, China will provide $2 million in emergency humanitarian relief to the Syrian people.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, China stands ready to shoulder its full responsibilities, engage in patient and full consultation with all sides on an equal basis, and push for an early political settlement of the Syrian crisis.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): Let me begin by welcoming you, Foreign Secretary Hague, and the other Ministers to the Security Council. I would like to thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for organizing today's debate to discuss developments in West Asia and North Africa over the past year. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, you Mr. President, and the other speakers for the valuable statements made here today. We have listened carefully to the views expressed and hope that today's deliberations will help the international community to develop a more coordinated and consensual outlook to the serious challenges posed by developments in the region and beyond.

For more than a millennium now, societies in West Asia and North Africa have played an important role in world history. By virtue of the genius of their peoples, their strategic location and, more recently, their natural resources, those societies have attracted considerable interest from far and wide. Over centuries, countries in the region have built multifaceted socio-economic and strategic linkages with the rest of world. Developments in the region have implications within and beyond the region, and they naturally are of interest to the international community.

The relationship between India and the Arab world is unique, with age-old historic and cultural connections. The impact of the Arab and Islamic world on India itself has been profound and far-reaching, giving rise to a composite culture that is rich in its diversity and enduring in its essential unity. The region is home to over 6 million Indians, with some of our largest economic and trade linkages. It is also the most important source for our energy needs and, being in our extended neighbourhood, vitally important to India.

The unrest in West Asia and North Africa, which began more than a year ago, has its roots in the desire of people to play a greater role in shaping their destiny, politically and economically. Those aspirations will not be met through violence or armed struggle, and a solution cannot be reached through prescriptions from outside. In fact, given the history of foreign interference, such prescriptions will not only be suspect in the eyes of various segments of society, but may also have the potential to exacerbate the problem.

In dealing with developments in West Asia and North Africa, the international community needs to use all the tools of diplomacy at its disposal and be there to assist the concerned countries in transitioning to an inclusive and participatory polity while maintaining social stability and cohesion. Since the exact nature of grievances varies from country to country, there is no one set of measures that can be applied to all of them. The solutions of the problems in each country have to take into consideration the society's particular circumstances and the genius of its people. However, what is certain is that solutions cannot include intervention through military force or arming the civilian population. Such a course of action will only fuel further bloodshed and instability and create new marginalized groups. It also risks breeding extremism and intolerance, whose adverse consequences will be felt in the region and beyond.

I would like to recall that the Father of the Indian nation, Mahatma Gandhi, said that "non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind". Even during the course of the past year, we have seen that wherever changes have taken place without violence, not only has normalcy returned faster but the changes have been accepted by society as a whole. We are therefore of the considered view that the political leaders of the concerned countries in West Asia and North Africa should resolve their problems through inclusive internal political processes that meet the aspirations of their people, in an atmosphere free of violence and bloodshed. The principles of national sovereignty, political independence and territorial unity and integrity must be respected.

The international community should — including through the auspices of the United Nations — use diplomatic leverage and make available technical assistance in fields such as political, security and justice sector reforms, the drafting of new constitutions and legal frameworks, electoral institutions and the conduct of elections, among others. Actions based on selective or partial interpretations of a mandate of the United Nations must be avoided to ensure that long-term political reconciliation is achieved among various sections of society through peaceful, inclusive political processes.

The international community also needs to be galvanized to expeditiously resolve the long-pending problem of the West Asian and North African region, namely, the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the Israeli-Palestinian problem. That problem cannot be allowed to be lost in the din and preoccupations of other developments in the region. Quite apart from the fact that without a resolution of that conflict, developments in West Asia and North Africa cannot be adequately addressed, we seriously run the risk of violence if the people of Palestine feel marginalized and sense a complete loss of attention to their plight. Their protests may get radicalized unless concrete action is taken to end the occupation of Arab lands, so that all peoples in the region can live in peace in their respective homelands and build cooperative relations. Moreover, the call of the international community for democratic and political reforms sounds hollow to Palestinians and other people in the region living under occupation. In that connection, some important and immediate measures need to be taken, including putting an end to all settlement activities and favourable consideration by this Council of the Palestinian application for membership in the Organization.

As the world's largest democracy, India supports measures taken by the countries in the region to address the grievances of their people in an atmosphere free of violence and bloodshed. India stands ready to share its experiences with the concerned countries in building democratic and plural political institutions and to partner with them in such fields as the drafting of new constitutional and legal frameworks, judicial and security sector reforms, the creation of impartial and independent electoral institutions for the conduct of elections, and human resource development, including training and technical assistance.

India will continue to support the Council in meeting the challenge of assisting the countries of West Asia and North Africa in implementing required political reforms without recourse to violence or violations of fundamental human rights, and in building an inclusive political system that enables the participation of all people. Only that will create long-term peace, security and stability within the region and beyond.

Mr. Sangqu (South Africa): South Africa expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his briefing to the Council. We thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for organizing this important debate. It is indeed important that we reflect on the momentous events that have resulted in significant political changes in the Arab world. More importantly, this is an opportunity to share ideas on how to deal with those countries that are still embroiled in conflicts and those that are going through a post-conflict phase. The year 2011 will forever be ingrained in the memory of the world as the year of Arab uprisings, characterized by, inter alia, mass protests and armed insurgencies.

Our assessment of the uprisings in the Arab States, many created as colonial constructs resulting from the Sykes-Picot Agreement, shows that those protests, were, among other things, a cry for political emancipation from decades of totalitarianism, a cry for proportionate distribution of wealth and power, and a call for participation in democratic processes, including governance, and access to economic opportunities.

It is clear that the patience of those peoples, who had lived under repressive regimes for many years, had

been tested to the maximum. Indeed, the social contract in those societies had broken down irretrievably. The Arab Spring is a clear indication of how much the people of those countries yearn for freedom, democracy and other basic human rights.

The five volumes of the United Nations Development Programme's *Arab Human Development Report* provide relevant insights into the causes and the warnings of the Arab revolutions. The first edition, published in 2002, noted that the freedom deficit in the Arab world undermined human development and was one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development.

Subsequently, seven years later, the 2009 edition further noted that approximately 30 per cent of young people in Arab countries were unemployed, that more than 50 per cent of the population was under the age of 24, and that 51 million new jobs needed to be created by 2020 in order to avoid an increase in the unemployment rate. Those and other similar reports should have raised alarms in the Arab world and compelled Governments to realize that the socio-economic and development needs of the people — particularly young people — needed to be addressed. The fact that most if not all of the uprisings were initiated by young people should not be surprising.

Obviously, in today's rapidly globalizing and integrated world, the turmoil in the Arab world does not only affect Arab peoples and is not limited to the Arab world. The rest of the world has been affected in many ways, including through rising oil prices, the growing number of refugees, the rise in the number of illegal weapons, and increased tensions between nations. Given the umbilical cord that connects Africa to the Arab world, the African continent has been adversely affected as a result of the undesirable spillover effects of the Arab revolutions. In that regard, we humbly offer the following thoughts for consideration.

First, South Africa strongly believes that it is essential that Governments should respect the will of the people. It is therefore essential that the peoples of the region gain the opportunity to determine their future. That can happen only if the systems established reflect the aspirations of the people of the various countries in the region, including of women and youth.

Secondly, security and development are interlinked. As the Security Council acknowledged in its presidential statement of February 2011 (S/PRST/2011/4), development can no longer be divorced from deliberations and interventions that are traditionally security-related. The Council also recognized that that is an essential element of its work in the maintenance of international peace and security. We emphasize that that does not necessarily mean that the Council has to usurp developmental functions undertaken by other bodies within the United Nations system, but rather that it should take social and development issues into account in relevant deliberations within its Charter mandate. Given the nature of the developments in the Middle East and North Africa in the past year, more focus should be placed on the relevant developmental challenges that the people of that region face.

Thirdly, South Africa reiterates its view that the Council should strengthen its conflict prevention mechanisms by elaborating a comprehensive prevention strategy. At the centre of that strategy should be the strengthening of the United Nations and regional early warning apparatus. In our view, it is vital that developmental aspects should also be integrated into our efforts at conflict prevention, resolution, management and post-conflict peacebuilding.

Fourthly, related to what I have just mentioned, partnerships with international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank and regional development structures, are critical in buttressing peace efforts in countries in transition. Equally, we emphasize the importance of context-specific and nationally owned interventions.

Fifthly, as those countries transition into democracy, there is a need to address the wrongs of the past through efforts aimed at reconciliation and transitional justice. Reconciliation efforts should be undertaken and supported by the Council. We would warn against prescribing how such efforts should be undertaken, as each conflict is unique, but the international community should support the people of the region in that important area.

Related to reconciliation efforts is the need to ensure adherence to the rule of law. In January, the Council emphasized the need for universal adherence to, and implementation of, the rule of law, and that the promotion of the rule of law and justice was an indispensable element for peaceful coexistence (see S/PV.6705). The discussions underscored the

inextricable link between the promotion of justice and the attainment of peace in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Lastly, we should warn that it is not in the interests of international peace and security for the international community, including the Security Council, to use the plight of the Arab peoples to pursue self-interest and execute regime change. As the United Nations, we should abide by the same international law of which we purport to be the master protagonists. Therefore, the United Nations itself and countries implementing its mandates should at all times adhere to international law.

In dealing with those many challenges, it is important that we work together with regional and subregional organizations, which, more often than not, have the relevant insights into the dynamics of a given conflict and often what solutions to employ. We have seen such collaboration produce positive results recently in Yemen, and we hope that it will equally assist with respect to the situation in Syria.

Whereas the Arab Spring has brought a glimmer of hope to many in the Arab world, it has unfortunately left some of the long-standing issues of human rights abuses and colonization unresolved. In that regard, we are reminded of the plight of the people of Western Sahara and Palestine, who still yearn for freedom despite the seismic political and economic shifts that have engulfed the region.

In conclusion, the observation of former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the current envoy to Syria, remains valid today when he stated that:

> "We will not enjoy development without security, or security without development. We will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed."

Flowing from those words, we offer our support to the peoples of the Arab world as they chart a better future for themselves. We hope that, at the centre of our efforts to improve the lives of those peoples, we will be guided by the notion of creating an environment within which citizens can live in harmony, fulfil themselves and enjoy life in greater freedom.

Mr. Mehdiyev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank the United Kingdom for convening this debate on the situation in the Middle East. We welcome His Excellency Secretary of State William Hague, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the other distinguished participants in this very important meeting.

Finding a point of departure for discussions on the pending challenges that the Middle Eastern societies have found themselves facing, and extrapolating on prospective opportunities ensuing from those challenges, could be an onerous task. Suffice it to say that the wave of changes that has encompassed the region since last year has dramatically altered the security situation and the political and societal status quo in many Middle Eastern societies and beyond. The upheavals that set some countries of the region on the path of transformation have fundamentally reshaped the typical set of features that once characterized the region.

The changes reflect the natural aspirations of people for greater freedom and wider political participation. Against that backdrop, the will and tenacity of people to write their own future within democratic States, with functioning State institutions and respect for the rule of law and human rights, should be commended and supported. We believe that consistency and incessant efforts will lead to the achievement of targeted objectives.

At the same time, in spite of the promises brought by the process of democratic transition, one should not forget that it is an extremely responsible stage in the history of the Middle East that demands the highest vigilance and laborious work in order to rule out miscalculations and unpredictability as to the region's future. The method of violence as a means of achieving political objectives is not itself a democracy, which cannot be propagated by the sword and imposed from outside. Any process within either an individual State or a region as a whole should be built on a sound legitimate basis, while progressive economic and democratic development should be an objective for all Governments. Azerbaijan commends the reconciliation efforts of the national authorities in a number of countries of the Middle East to find negotiated and effective solutions, with the participation of all strata and political forces of their societies.

We regret seeing the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process. At the same time, Azerbaijan commends and highly values the consistent

efforts of Jordan to revive the dialogue and resume the negotiations towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution.

Azerbaijan is deeply concerned about the continuing illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. Apart from the impact on the rights, freedoms and everyday lives of the Palestinians, settlements cause serious damage to the peace process and, more dangerously, threaten a two-State solution and the emergence of a viable Palestinian State.

In that regard, I would like to stress once again that, in contrast to some other well-known situations involving groundless and illegitimate territorial claims, including those under the concocted pretext of care for ethnic minority groups, the right to self-determination and statehood of the people of Palestine has been recognized.

With respect to the occupied Palestinian territories and similar situations in other parts of the world, we proceed from the importance of reaffirming the continuing applicability of all relevant international legal norms, achieving the invalidation of activities aimed at the consolidation of military occupations, initiating urgent measures towards removing the adverse effects of such activities and discouraging any further practices of the same or a similar nature.

The Security Council cannot remain indifferent to situations involving serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and, in performing its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, must react adequately in order to put an end to illegal practices and policies and to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are observed and respected. It is also important to fully utilize the advantage of cultural diversity through promoting inter-communal dialogue and reconciliation, while categorically rejecting and invalidating any manifestation of ethnic and religious intolerance.

The situation in Syria remains worrisome, with rampant violence and human rights abuses that have resulted in increasing the civilian death toll. We are of the strong view that the only solution to the crisis in Syria is through an all-inclusive and Syrian-led political process, where all national stakeholders demonstrate determination to solve the crisis peacefully. Azerbaijan encourages all parties in Syria to fully cooperate with the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Kofi Annan. We hope that his mission will contribute to ending violence and facilitating a peaceful solution.

As has been pointed out during this debate, repression does not deliver stability, peace or security, and Governments that suppress basic freedoms will always be unstable. As a country that suffers from prolonged occupation of its territories and the resulting massive population displacement, Azerbaijan believes that the same understanding should apply equally to inter-State relations. The behaviour of Governments that resort to force to capture the territory of another sovereign State and authorize attacks on civilians and ethnic cleansing cannot be tolerated. It is of paramount importance that the international community unite its efforts and speak with one voice to reject repressive policies in inter-State relations, overcome mutual mistrust and double standards, and achieve the uniform application of international law and democratization of international relations.

Mr. Osorio (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Please pass on, Mr. President, to Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Mr. William Hague, how much we appreciated him being with us here today for the debate, as well as to the other Ministers for Foreign Affairs who came to be with us. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia was not able, for unexpected reasons, to participate as she had intended to. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his interesting analysis of the subject at hand, which illustrates very well how things are developing.

Several common features can be found in what has happened during the past year in countries of the Middle East and North Africa, events that are part of what we have been calling the Arab Spring: a primarily young population, affected by high rates of unemployment and exclusive political systems that are not able to adequately represent the interests of the various sectors of society. We must also add the impact of new information technologies on the cohesion and leadership of popular movements. Under those conditions, where profound inequities and political, economic and social exclusion converge, a process aimed at transforming the prevailing order emerges and seeks economic and political changes and alternatives, allowing participation and the opening of new spaces

and means of expression, which imply, in short, demands for fundamental rights.

Notwithstanding those common elements, the transformations and processes have followed very different courses in the various countries of the region, and this is why we need to analyse each case on its own merits. The response of the international community to the challenges and opportunities that arise from that process have been centred around prevention and the cessation of violence and violent repression against civilian populations crying out to have their fundamental human rights and freedoms respected. That includes the freedoms of election and association, the recognition of the rights of women and gender equality, the rights of minorities, as well as access to economic opportunities.

In a region that is as complex as it is vital for the maintenance of international peace and security, the authorities encounter major difficulties and limitations in their response to the demands and expectations of a population eager for reforms. In order to overcome a past of authoritarianism and sectarianism, it is not enough to simply hold periodic elections. There needs to be a gradual establishment of political parties, a strengthening of civil society organizations and ideological pluralism, free access to information and the exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights. That requires time for learning and the decisive support of the international community for national efforts. The transition towards societies that are more democratic and representative requires the convergence and participation of all sectors of society around common principles and purposes. Sound and suitable institutional arrangements are required in order to channel the various social demands and, at the same time, avoid polarization, while building the institutions and legal framework that will encompass relations between citizens and their Governments.

The international community is astonished to see how disproportionate force is being used against the civilian population in Syria. Systematic violations of fundamental freedoms and human rights have been witnessed, and extremes have been reached that must be qualified as crimes against humanity. That is unacceptable and must be categorically condemned, particularly by the Security Council, using the means that it has at its disposal.

Colombia has resolutely supported and participated in the efforts of the international community aimed at putting an end to this unheard of situation and all forms of violence and violations of human rights and at promoting a transition to a democratic and pluralistic system. In order to avoid situations such as this the Security Council should stress the use of the instruments of preventive diplomacy that it has at its disposal in order to reduce the threats posed by armed conflicts and their associated human costs. We must use all the peaceful means available to us to protect civilians from violence, in accordance with the principles and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations and in full respect for the principles of territorial integrity, national unity, sovereignty and the political independence of States.

The Council must maintain close cooperation with regional organizations and give priority to strategies aimed at preventing conflicts through mediation and good offices. The League of Arab States, the African Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Gulf Cooperation Council have a privileged position, with unique access to key players and with knowledge and experience of the situation in the region that are exceptional, and their participation as strategic partners is, therefore, key for developing actions that are appropriate for the particular circumstances and needs of each country of the region. My country naturally gives all of its support to the actions of those organizations.

Our support and that of the international community in such situations will be more effective and sustainable if we are able to recognize political and cultural contexts and if the Governments and peoples continue working together towards consolidating the progress achieved. The spontaneous movement that is the Arab Spring opens the way for the progressive establishment of States and Governments based on respect and the genuine implementation of democratic principles and the rule of law. Those recently formed Governments should anchor their legitimacy in respect for the rights of the population, the provision of basic social services, the generation of employment and the creation of conditions promoting sustainable economic development, the benefits of which will be a tangible reality for all citizens without distinction.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Mr. William Hague and the

Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom for convening today's high-level debate. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the Secretary-General and the honourable Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the United States, France, Russia, Germany, Guatemala and Portugal.

Sitting in this Chamber today, Sir, I shall start off by referring to your distinguished compatriot in Cambridge, Mr. Stephen Hawking, and his fraternity who are with him in surveying the universe, and specifically in demarcating dark space/spaces. Those dark spaces constitute the vast majority of the universe today, and in this Chamber today I have witnessed those spaces in many long diatribes in which so much has been said and yet not said. Hawking has cautioned all of us that the dark spaces that constitute the vast majority of the universe are not dormant spaces. The majority of those vast spaces will one day unleash their silent fury, and he cautions us to be prepared. I believe that we should be so prepared with respect to so much that we do not say, or dare to say, in this house today.

In North Africa and the Middle East, under discussion today, we have witnessed important developments. My country firmly believes in the fulfilment of the aspirations of the people and their rights to be masters of their own destiny, to speak and to be heard, and to pursue their legitimate aspirations. No effort should be spared in accommodating those efforts. We therefore strongly condemn the use of force against peaceful protestors, as well as violations of human rights wherever they occur and irrespective of who the perpetrators may be, as a matter of principle.

As one of the bigger democratic countries, we are firmly committed to the ideals, values and principles of the United Nations and believe that the legitimate aspirations of people should be accommodated peacefully, without external interference and in a matter consistent with the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of States.

Today, in support of those embattled societies, I again urge the Council to please remember that no movement in the world, including the great revolutions, has succeeded without external help. They cannot be stroked out with a pen. Anyone who seeks to rationalize a principled position by riding the high horse of morality very truly needs to narrow the distances by treading slowly on what might be referred to as lowly grounds.

But the support that we extend to the legitimate wishes of people has to be within the confines of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States and supporting such concepts as regime change are alien to the ethos of international good-neighbourliness.

The changes in the region under discussion today have often been referred to as the Arab Spring. The concept of spring evokes images of rebirth, change, renewal, warmth and beauty. It should have an air of tranquillity and harmony about it. More than anything else, it is a natural process than can neither be forced nor be abrupt. This has to be understood. Winter evolves into spring and spring brings an end to winter's hardness. That natural process of evolution must therefore be allowed to take its course uninterrupted. So we welcome change when it is locally led, peaceful and an expression of the aspirations of the people. Solutions to problems have to be found by the people themselves and not, I repeat, not imposed from outside.

The Foreign Minister of Jordan, Mr. Nasser Judeh, made a remarkable statement on 29 February to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament that I keep going back to time and time again. He told the Committee that there can be no complete Arab Spring or Arab awakening without peace in the Middle East. And there will never be peace in the Middle East without a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This, then, is the context of my speech — the winter of Arab discontent. Can we usher in a vast spring with that winter consistently raising its head? I do not think so. The denial of the Palestinian right to self-determination is at the heart of unrest in the region. If peace in the Middle East is to be lasting, progress on the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel conflicts is necessary as well. Israel must withdraw completely from the occupied Lebanese lands and the occupied Syrian Golan, in compliance with relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

With the continuation of Israeli settlement activity, hope for the Palestinians to have a viable State of their own is fading fast. We have had grim reminders of that delivered to the Council in the recent briefings by representatives of the Department of Political Affairs and a number of Member States. There is a general belief that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is becoming increasingly volatile. Given such factors as the ever-increasing settlement

activity and settler violence, the continued blockade of the Gaza Strip, diminished economic prospects for the population, vandalization of the holy sites, the plight of Palestinian prisoners, and so on, it is understandable that the people should be on tenterhooks. A small spark could turn into a big fire.

We also condemn any pipe bombs being fired from the Gaza Strip, but we believe that the biggest threat to international peace and security arises from one particular aspect. Yet the Council continues to do nothing cogent for the Palestinians. Each time that Council members meet, we are told that the Quartet is now discussing the matter. I await the day that the Quartet will produce a result that will substantially change the plight of these people.

One of the best things to do, and we have so moved, is that if it is agreed that Gaza should be given provisions, we should take a flotilla, land on the beaches and deliver to the inhabitants, through the United Nations, the security and the food that they require. We strongly feel that now is as appropriate a time as any to send a strong, unified signal to the occupying Power to stop its activities, specifically in land-grabbing.

There continuously arises a matter here that I would like to dispel once and for all. I may or may not succeed. It is basically that, whenever anyone queries whether Islam and democracy are incompatible, the answer is that they are not incompatible. Only Huntington really believes that they are incompatible. I believe that it is a question of time even there. But I would like to say very emphatically that our prophet basically called all our brothers in Islam as brothers and asked them to share their surpluses as well as their shortcomings. In my opinion, there is no better manifestation of democracy. Furthermore, he asked Muslims to reach out to the world in peace. For reasons of learning, he told them to go to China, which was not a Muslim brother State. That does not matter. It shows the vastness of the vision of the person of the prophet. When he found that things were not good for Muslims in Mecca, where he started out, he told them to go to the brotherly king of Ethiopia, who happened to be a Christian, and said that he would look after them. That vast outreach shows the beauty of what is already available. We need not confer too much distinction on Huntington.

I will conclude this segment by reiterating our support for the Palestinian people in their just struggle for peace and the right to self-determination and their membership, as was said by my Indian colleague, in the United Nations at the earliest. We feel that Palestine will remain the biggest challenge of the Middle East. That opportunity is being afforded by this wave of fulfilment of aspirations in the name of the people of the Middle East through the Arab Spring. I feel that the Palestinians should also benefit, and not lose. I reiterate that without resolution of this core issue, as was said by the Foreign Minister of Jordan, we will not be able to see real peace in the region.

I would also like to address five crucial points raised by the Secretary-General in his statement. I believe that those are crucial points, as he himself says.

He first speaks of leaders choosing the path of meaningful reform and says that people do not want cosmetic changes that give only the merest taste of democracy. I believe that a great American president, many years ago, spoke of the four freedoms. I believe that there must be a basic intent on the part of the United Nations for fundamental legislative action by the General Assembly and the Security Council with respect to the basic democratic requirements of statehood in which those freedoms should be enshrined. Everyone who wishes to be a Member here must at some stage be able to resolve and come to this particular aspect. I believe that just naming them as a pillar would not be enough; it would be important to have a minimum legislated induction into all the documents in the world where such elements such as promoting pluralism and the rights of minorities would be the minimum requirement.

We just celebrated International Women's Day. Women get that once a year and they happen to be a majority in the world. I feel that we have to rectify those matters first. We have to understand that women have a crucial role to play, without which we will never get anywhere.

I also take very strongly his third aspect, that women have stood in the squares and streets demanding change and now have the right to sit at the table with real influence in decision-making, and safe from violence, intimidation and abuse. That is happening even now in the Arab Spring. Last week, eight members of the Council met with women from Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, and

we heard those women and were shocked. One of the things they said, which I think we should support very strongly here, is that 25 per cent of all financing through the United Nations must be earmarked for delivery into the hands of women. Do not forget, they constitute 75 per cent of the world. Women end up feeding, clothing and looking after children, not only doing all the work but having to do it; yet they do not get the benefit of their husbands' employment, especially not in the Third World. In addition, 25 per cent of all delegations visiting, calling on or meeting with the United Nations should be made up of women. We need to make it necessary that they be part. They have made more sacrifices than anyone in this Spring, as we call it, so then let them be able to be a part of that complete change.

When we speak about the fourth pillar, opportunities for young people, there are 200 million more in Asia. I think that takes on an importance that cannot be denied.

There must be regional peace for the Palestinians. If there was a Balfour Declaration that brought the State of Israel to where it is today, then let us have a Balfour Declaration for the Palestinians as well.

In conclusion, in the context of world peace and the Middle East, I would like to stress that while we understand all sorts of needs arising on security, it would be better for that region and the whole world if the situation of Iran could be stopped from moving towards conflict, because it will be the sort of conflict that might have a very unfortunate impact on the world and that might be the proverbial last straw that breaks the camel's back on world peace. I hope not. We understand the seriousness of it. We also hope that with the accumulated diplomacy here we can do better.

The President: The representative of Morocco has asked to take the floor to make a further brief statement.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I shall be very brief. Earlier, a delegation thought it was a good idea to refer to a situation that has absolutely nothing to do with today's debate. It made comparisons that are as baseless as they are inopportune. I intend neither to follow nor to entertain that attempt to disrupt our debate, much less to detract from the positive message of support and encouragement that we hope will emerge from this high-level meeting. That is our goal and should be the goal of all delegations. I would like each and every one of them to adhere to that premise and to contribute in a positive manner.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12:30 p.m.